

February 4, 2009

Chairperson Henry and Members of the Committee,

For the record my name is Sylvia Danforth. I'm from Miles City and I am the executive director of DEAP, a not for profit agency providing a variety of services to children and families in eastern Montana. DEAP was awarded the first pilot project in the state initiating family based in-home services to families at imminent risk of losing their children because of abuse and neglect. In the almost 20 years that we have continued contracting with the State there have been many changes that strengthen the services to assure that the focus of In- Home services is to keep children from entering the foster care system, as well as to reunify families by improving the safety concerns and changing the conditions in the home.

The goals of In- Home services to decrease child abuse and neglect and increase the capacity of at – risk families to nurture their children in healthy environments and to decrease the time children spend in foster care support improved outcomes for permanency, improve parent skills and family self-sufficiency. The services are preventative, cost effective and the collaborative partnerships between the family, child protective service worker and In- Home service worker support successful intervention outcomes.

These services work. Children are reunited with families, spend less time in foster care and parents develop the skills to successfully cope with the stress of raising children. When a parent is not able to make the necessary changes they have the opportunity to be partners in permanency decisions for their children. Over the years the abusive behaviors of the parents referred for services has increased, requiring more intense intervention and families coping with essential needs like housing, health care, medicine, food, employment demand even greater collaborations with community partners. The costs of providing the service are substantially more and the amount of direct service to the parents is greater. However, in the last 6 year period DEAP's contract budget to provide these services has decreased \$21,529 and in FY'05 when an increase was given in July, it was taken away in December. In FY'08 the regional director took over \$16,000 out of the foster care budget to help with the deficit that DEAP had in providing these services.

Now we've been notified that the State will lose approximately \$85,000 in FFY09 from the federal funding used to provide In-Home/reunification services in the state and that we should expect yet another cut in these services. If this happens, many families will lose the opportunity to participate in this effective service. The needs are greater, the geographical area is larger, the intensity of problems is greater and funding is half what it needs to be to maintain status quo. Please consider the critical need for maintaining the budget for the In-Home/reunification services provided by not for profits contracting with the State

Thank you for all you do and for your continued support of these essential services for children and families.